

Is “lofi hip hop” Just Gentrified Boom Bap?

 loudnewsnet.com/is-lo-fi-gentrified-boom-bap

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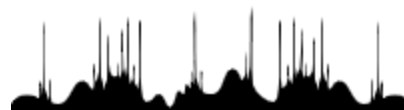


Photo by [Annie Theby](#) on [Unsplash](#) , with some Loud OG flavor

Let’s get this out of the way first: I love “lofi hip hop.” It’s on all the damn time at my abode. That said, I also love third-wave coffee shops in “up-and-coming” neighborhoods.

Recently, [dope-ass producer Jah Freedom](#) posed a question on social media, “Is lofi hip hop just gentrified boom bap?” It was meant as a funny little joke but the thought has stuck with

me ever since. Especially because I begrudgingly love lo-fi hip-hop. And I look like gentrification personified.

On Gentrification

The term “gentrification” gets thrown around a whole lot, often by people who have great intentions but no fucking clue what they’re talking about. So let’s break down what it means. Here’s what Merriam-Webster has to say about it.

gen·tri·fi·ca·tion

jen-trə-fə-'kā-shən \

: the process of repairing and rebuilding homes and businesses in a deteriorating area (such as an urban neighborhood) accompanied by an influx of middle-class or affluent people and that often results in the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents

The Oxford English Dictionary also defines gentrification as, “the process of making a person or activity more refined or polite.”

While it may be hard to get a strict definition of what is and isn’t gentrification, most of us know it when we see it. It’s the upscale artisan bakery replacing the neighborhood panaderia. The barbershop that serves top-flight bourbon. And yes, those minimalist coffee shops I love so much.

So how does lo-fi hip-hop fit into this? Let’s take a look.



It's these apartments. Always these apartments.

On lo-fi hip-hop

By now you've probably seen the following preview on Youtube. That, or you've seen the image floating around in memes.



This looping image of a bored-ass girl is the lone video presence for one of the world’s most popular YouTube videos—[lo-fi hip-hop beats to study/relax to](#). Curated by ChilledCow, the live stream averages around 40,000 people at a time.

ChilledCow’s mix is definitely not the first lo-fi [hip-hop](#) mix to gain traction, but it is without a doubt the most popular. It is also likely many people’s introduction to the genre.

As a genre, lo-fi hip-hop is defined by flat-sounding “crunchy” drums often laid over jazz samples and the occasional bass line. Sound familiar?

Is lo-fi hip-hop just gentrified boom-bap?

In order to see if lo-fi hip-hop is just a gentrified version of boom bap, let’s establish some criteria. For the sake of space and verbiage, we’re going to consider boom bap the “neighborhood” that is or is not being gentrified.

When we refer to boom bap, we’re referring to traditional or “gold school” hip-hop. Samples, minimalist basslines, and thicc-ass drums.



If boom bap drums were a statue

In order for something to be gentrified, a few things need to happen:

- The neighborhood is previously inhabited by low-income or marginalized people

- The neighborhood previously had characteristics which are considered offensive to polite society
- Changes or upgrades to the neighborhood remove “distasteful” elements that cause discomfort and make it more suited to the tastes of polite society.
- These changes may make it harder for older residents to be visible or cared for.
- New residents do not fit into the same social class as older residents and often look different from them too.
- New residents and the changes they bring replace the old residents.

If we're okay with accepting these conditions, let's break it down line by line.

Condition #1: The neighborhood is previously inhabited by low-income or marginalized people

Boom bap absolutely checks this box. The sound was born in part because government budget cuts to public school music programs left a lot of young inner-city kids without musical outlets.

When the likes of the MPC and SP1200 came around, it gave people who couldn't read music a chance to play it. The entire sound is born out of oppression.

Condition #2: The neighborhood previously had characteristics which are considered offensive to polite society

Re: boom bap. Is this even a question? You'd be hard-pressed to find a more maligned genre of art in American history.



Tipper Gore defends America from 2 Live Crew

Condition #3: Changes or upgrades to the neighborhood remove “distasteful” elements that cause discomfort and make it more suited to the tastes of polite society.

So what changes has lo-fi hip-hop made? Well, for the most part, lo-fi is mostly quiet instrumental music. It removes the loud, brash sound associated with hip hop. Perhaps more importantly, it removes the black voice—typically seen as something to fear by “polite” aka gentrifier society.

Condition #4: These changes may make it harder for older residents to be visible or cared for.

My personal theory is that most lo-fi producers probably grew up solely on J-Dilla’s “Donuts” and “Madvillainy”. Even if that’s not the case, where do you see lo-fi producers big-upping their influences? Perhaps the sheer volume of artists and the faceless nature of the genre make it hard to do that, but there is very little attribution, if any, in the genre.

Condition #5: New residents do not fit into the same social class as older residents and often look different from them too.

This one's tough because of the aforementioned notability issues with the genre. But what we do know about lo-fi is that a lot of the most notable producers in the genre are from Europe (read: white). This would be in stark contrast from boom bap producers.

Condition #6: New residents and the changes they bring replace the old residents.

This is where the gentrification comparison begins to decompose. The presence of lo-fi music doesn't taint or ruin boom bap. It doesn't block anyone's access to the genre. It seems to live in addition to it. Pete Rock and J Dilla's legacy are more or less safe, for now.



Throw up a peace sign if you still miss J Dilla.

However, that could easily be my way of justifying enjoying it, even knowing that something feels off about it.

So is lo-fi hip-hop simply gentrified boom bap?

Well, kinda.

I would argue that the lack of replacement—up to this point—is its saving grace from that argument. But just like real gentrification, it's what we do with this information that's important.

Similar to the development of the places we live, the economic and social forces that guide the development of a music genre are powerful and often beyond our control. What we can control is how we continue to consciously make space for the original residents of the

neighborhood and honor what they've built.

Supastarr Deez

Supastarr Deez is a content creator, social justice enthusiast, and hunter/gatherer. When he's not writing you can find him cooking delicious meals for friends and family, searching out the finest coffee in your town, and trying to remember to breathe.



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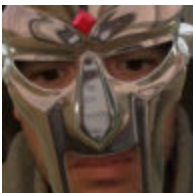


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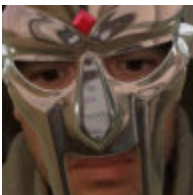


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